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Report: Waste Sector GHG Emissions Significantly Underestimated

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By Ben Messenger

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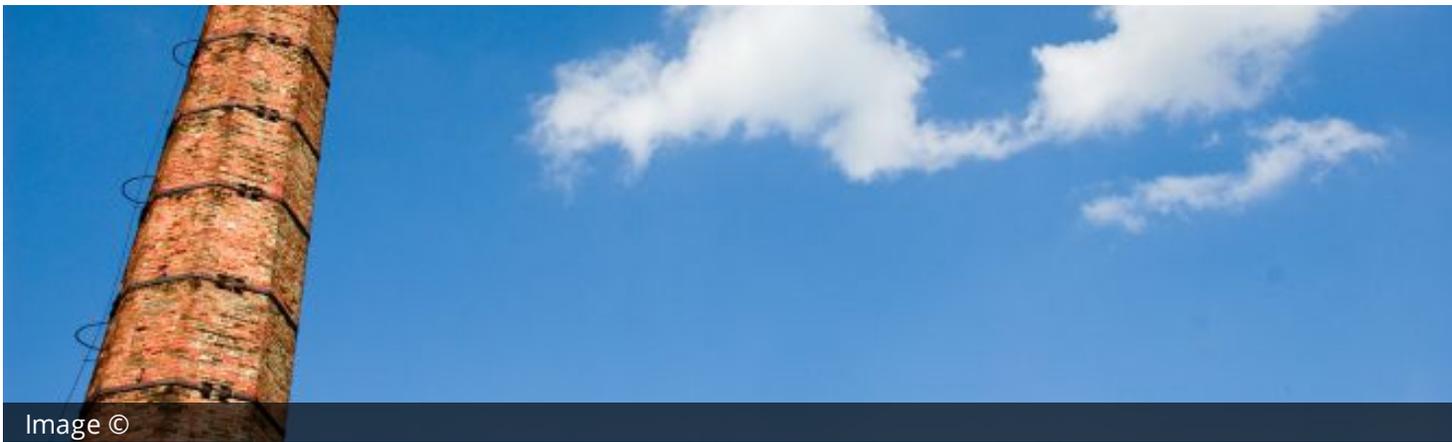


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The waste sector has a key role to play in the development of a low carbon economy and the reduction of greenhouse gases, according to a report published by Zero Waste Europe today.

The report, *The potential contribution of waste management to a low carbon economy*, was commissioned by **Zero Waste Europe**, in partnership with **Zero Waste France** and **ACR+** and prepared by Eunomia Research & Consulting's Ann Ballinger and Dominic Hogg.

It's key finding is that the role waste prevention and improved waste management can play in reducing GHG emissions and the development of a low carbon economy has previously been significantly understated.

ZWE noted that in December, delegates from across the world will gather in Paris to negotiate

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a new climate agreement aimed at replacing the Kyoto Protocol. The parties to the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are progressively publishing their pledges in terms of GHG reductions which are supposed to limit global warming to under 2°C.

Among the many possible climate change mitigation solutions that are emphasised, according to the report's authors, one that is consistently underestimated is the significance of waste management strategies.

One reason for this is said to be that the 'waste' section of the national inventories to the UNFCCC does not take into account most of the emissions from this sector. Emissions reported under this section mainly concern methane emissions from landfills. All the emissions related to the transport of waste and incineration with energy recovery are respectively reported under the transport and energy sections.

According to Zero Waste Europe (ZWE), the report also provides an accurate examination of the true impact of waste management on climate change and carbon emissions. It confirms that actions at the top of the waste hierarchy – including waste prevention initiatives, reuse and recycling – have considerable scope to reduce climate change emissions.

It is stated in the report that: "A climate friendly strategy, as regards materials and waste, will be one in which materials are continually cycling through the economy, and where the leakage of materials into residual waste treatments is minimised". For example, recycling 1 tonne of plastic packaging can be a saving of 500 kg CO₂ eq, whereas using one tonne less plastic packaging results in avoiding 6 times more emissions (3 tonnes CO₂ eq).

The authors make 11 key recommendations, calling for waste policies to be redesigned in order to prioritise the higher level options of the 'Waste Hierarchy' (waste prevention, reuse and recycling) and immediately reallocate climate finance subsidies which are currently

supporting energy generation from waste. These recommendations put a strong focus on correcting methodological issues that are currently preventing Member states and the European union from implementing waste policies that are efficient in terms of GHG emissions.

The report said that in the decarbonising economy required to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, technologies such as incineration will become less attractive options and ultimately present an obstacle to a low carbon economy.

Reaction

Marcel Vilella, Zero Waste Europe's associate director:

"For far too long the climate impact of waste management has been overlooked. Now it's clear that waste prevention, reuse and recycling are climate change solutions that need to be fully integrated into a low carbon economy. Both at the EU and international level, it is time to shift climate finance support to these climate-friendly options instead of waste incineration, which in fact contributes to climate change and displaces livelihoods of recyclers worldwide."

Delphine Lévi Alvarès, Zero Waste France's advocacy officer:

"With France hosting the COP21 in December, it is a real opportunity to raise decision makers' awareness about the real impact of waste management on climate change and the extent to which Zero Waste strategies have to be put on the agenda of solutions to climate mitigation supported by the French government."

Françoise Bonnet, Secretary general of ACR+:

"Efficiency and smart waste management is key for a low carbon economy. Still, it is only the tip of the iceberg as a much bigger impact can be achieved through resource efficiency and adopting a life-cycle perspective".

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